

Thrilling Adventure, Love, Intrigue and the Great War

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girl rose from her elbow and shot one short shrill sentence at the woman, which seemed effectually to subdue her. And after a few sullen sentences in reply she followed the direction of Amneh's pointing finger and retired to the other end of the Kaah and her embroidery frame.

Amneh watched her a moment through relentless half-closed eyes until the woman was seated, and then turned to Constance.

"Elle est si bete," she muttered. Nothing could have better conveyed the power of this new favorite than the complete air of confidence with which Amneh resumed their conversation.

"And she will not speak?" asked Constance anxiously.

"If she does, Hassan Isar shall divorce her," she replied cruelly.

This was how the word had turned. She used the little power that had been given her upon the poor creature she had displaced. Constance was beginning to wonder how she could use this power to her own advantage.

"And it is the one that is called the Sheikh Omar Khalil who is Conrad von Hengel?" she asked of Constance quietly. "You have seen him?"

"Through the window screen into the mandara from the room beyond. And he is a German, you say?"

"A captain in the Prussian army?"

"A German," said Amneh. And then, as though thinking aloud, "It is they who by a word could have prevented the slaughter of my people," she murmured softly.

But in the very softness of her speech was a new accent, as though it was the voice of some hidden vestige of her dead soul that spoke. And her dark eyes, as she gazed past Constance, seemed suddenly to blaze with the reflection of a hidden fire. Constance did not reply, for she seemed to feel that the moment was very significant to them both.

After a while Amneh turned to Constance with a smile.

"Tell me more of this valiant American, Monsieur Alan. You say he is very rich?" she asked.

CHAPTER XII.

The Alternative.

THE day passed quietly with no sign of von Hengel or the Sheikh, and Constance improved her opportunity to make a friend of Amneh. It was not difficult, for already they seemed to have been drawn toward each other by the common bonds of their youth and misfortune. Zeyneb bothered them no more, but sat apart at her embroidery frame, or superintended the work of Khadeegh, the

"I am very sorry," he replied, gravely. "That is a matter over which at present I have no control. The Sheikh Omar, who is my guest, will tell you that this is so."

"Sheikh Omar, as you call him," said Constance, with more contempt than wisdom, "has no control over me."

"That is as may be," said Hassan oracularly. "It is a matter which only concerns you and him. He awaits you in the guest room, yonder beyond the stair."

He pointed with his long arm in the direction beyond the hall and then clapped his hands, a signal answered at once by the Khadeegh, to whom he spoke a sentence.

Constance glanced at Amneh, who seemed to understand what had passed, and in her eyes Constance read that she must obey. Indeed, there seemed nothing else to do, and so she followed the slave out of the harem past a heavy hanging and down a short passage to a door where the girl, her face now veiled with the hem of her robe, stood aside and gestured to Constance to go in.

Von Hengel rose from the deewan as she entered and came forward briskly. "Fraulein," he muttered, "you must know that I am sorry."

Her lip curled contemptuously, but she took the seat he indicated, and sat for a moment silent, partly in fear and partly in anger, determined at least that she would first hear what he had to say to her.

"It is most unfortunate," he went on, "that Alan Jessup should have been so imprudent as to risk your precious life in this mad venture. As to myself, you must already be aware of the deep esteem in which I hold you. There were many things that I learned in America, one of them the real glory of its womanhood."

"To what end is this conversation, Captain von Hengel?" she broke in abruptly.

"To convince you that any damage to your feelings or your comfort are the out-

"Fraulein, you are choosing the wrong course. You have not had time to deliberate. I wish to be your friend, even if circumstances seem to make us enemies."

"A friend such as you were to Alan Jessup," she said, contemptuously. "A dog that bites the hand that feeds it."

If she had expected to see him angry his manner still more inflamed her. His fists tightened for a moment and his brows tangled, but he merely reached for a cigarette and a smile grew at his lips.

"You shall not anger me, Fraulein," he said suavely. "I owe you too much."

"Then pay it now and let me go," she stormed.

"I regret that that is impossible."

"Why?"

"You know too much, Fraulein. And, besides, I could not bear to part with you until I am sure that we are friends again."

"You'll wait long for that."

"I'm not so sure," he said, with a quick glance, while he lighted his cigarette. "You must admit that last night I was the means of saving you

you. How Alan Jessup could have discovered it I have no means of learning, for Alan"—he paused and smiled—"Alan has never been one to set the world on fire."

"It is always a mistake to underestimate," she said dryly.

"Alan has surprised me," he went on. "I may say he has delighted me, also, because a triumph won over intelligence is the only sort worth while."

"You are very sure of yourself."

"I am, or I should not be here. But it was necessary to talk with you."

Her look questioned.

"It is my desire to save you from the result of your imprudences. By all the

He glared and made a sudden movement toward her.

"You are a very brave woman, Fraulein," he said in a choked voice. And she realized that she had made a mistake. No Prussian can endure ridicule. She returned his sombre look with a smile.

"I am afraid I don't understand," she replied.

"Then listen," he said, brutally, now thoroughly angry. "We'll put pretences aside—the thin amenities of existence by which you Americans set such store. I will speak the truth. You are securely imprisoned in this house—as far from rescue by the British authorities as though I had taken you to the heart of the Arabian desert. You are my prisoner—mine, to do with as

is in my own hand. And you may be sure that I know how to play it. The German army will humble France, the navy England. Many lives have been spent and will be spent to gain that end. But the East is mine. Alone—single handed—I will win it for the Hohenzollern."

He paused in a moment of silent gratulation and communion.

"The world may not be conquered so easily, Conrad von Hengel."

He showed his teeth in a smile.

"Fraulein, I must come to the object of this interview," he said with sudden gravity. "For yourself there are two alternatives. One, to stay here a prisoner in this house when I am gone. The other to go with me—yonder—to my great destiny!"

She shrank imperceptibly within herself, but she had learned her lesson and gave no sign of her dismay at this alternative.

"If you stay here I cannot be responsible for you. You know the secret of the Kaba Stone and the Sheikh Hassan's share in this conspiracy against the power of Christendom. It is your death or his. I want you to go with me, Fraulein—into the East of the rising sun and the glory of achievement. I prefer that you should go willingly, because I want you to share with me the honors of my undertaking. There will be danger, but you do not fear that." He lowered his voice a note.

"Sometimes in America I have thought that you cared for me a little. Nicht wahr? I would have spoken in New York had I not seen that you were much disturbed over the war. Alan you refused. Why?"

She glanced up in surprise at this statement. He had risen and stood close beside her, peering down.

"Was it not because he was one who did not take a man's part in the great affairs of the world—because he lacked vision—because he did not dare greatly as the man of such a woman as you must do? Was not that why you refused him?"

"Who—who told you that?" she stammered.

"Alan himself."

"Oh," she muttered, in dismay.

He fell to his knees beside her and touched her fingers gently. With an intuition that she must listen and endure she did not withdraw them.

"Listen, Fraulein. A moment ago you angered me. I forgot myself. God knows I would not injure you, even if my life depended upon it. See. You are in my power—now—at this moment, and I do not use a finger to coerce you. But I am not a man to waste words. I love you, Fraulein. It has always been so. You have a mind. You think. You are beautiful and you are not afraid. You were born to mate with a man who had a great mission in the world. I ask nothing of you but that you go with me—willingly. I expect nothing of you but your allegiance. I will give you my great friendship, and you shall see that it is worth something. Perhaps some day you will not regret it—perhaps a time will come when you will forget your fears and care for me again a little. Is it not so?"

As her fingers remained cold in his he released them and rose.

"Ach, I have been too sudden with you. You are much upset. It is a great deal to think of, to decide in a few moments."

"I am very tired to-night, Captain von Hengel," she murmured.

"Of course," he said, in a soothing voice. "You are tired. It is very thoughtless of me. You shall go to sleep and to-morrow you will think about it, nicht wahr?"

"Yes," she said, mechanically. "I will think about it. You—you rather have taken my breath away, Captain von Hengel."

"And now I give it back to you," he said, moving toward the door. "You shall return to the harem and be in peace."

He clasped his hands in signal to the harem and then as she rose, bowed over her fingers. "You will try to forgive me. I am a brute—a beast, as you say. But I have many worries—the fate of nations. I have not permitted women to interest me. But you, Fraulein!"

Khadeegh at this moment entered, and stood at the doorway, silent.

"You forgive me, Fraulein?" he muttered again.

She nodded, let him press his lips to her fingers, and followed the black girl out of the door.

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To Be Continued Next Sunday.

"You are a Christian and my prisoner of war. You are my slave. I can make you my wife to-morrow—and divorce you when I choose."

black slave, in setting the rooms in order and in preparing the meals which they ate squatted upon the floor around a small silver tray upon a tabourette.

It was not until after the evening meal that the visit of the Sheikh was announced. There was a clapping of hands downstairs in the mandara, which seemed to be the signal for rather elaborate feminine preparations. Amneh putting on her kurs and safa and slipping into a rather gorgeous crimson saltah or jacket and a gibe of purple velvet, and disposed herself upon a deewan in the sadr or upper end of the room to await the arrival of her lord. Constance, herself somewhat uncertain as to her own status in this household, found the opportunity to note the extreme care with which the favorite put on her apparel and keenly watched the conduct of both women as the sheikh appeared. He stood at the entrance of the kaah, removing his slippers and pronouncing the words which Constance had already learned, and the women gave appropriate reply. Zeyneb softly, seizing his right hand and raising it to her forehead. But even as she did so his gaze passed to Amneh beyond her, who had half risen and was showing her white teeth in a smile.

"On you be peace, and the mercy of God and His blessings," she murmured.

Sheikh Hassan bowed sedately to Constance, but passed her by and went at once to Amneh's side, seating himself in the centre of the deewan, thus giving her the place of honor at his right. They conversed for a few moments in Arabic. And then the Sheikh addressed the American girl in English.

"I hope, madame, that you have been well cared for."

"I have nothing to complain of," she said, steadily, "but the loss of my liberty."

come of a situation which you yourself have created."

"You mean," she replied, coolly, "that you dare to take advantage of the helplessness of a woman. It is quite in accord with your national character."

"I am sorry you said that. We are at war. All means are fair. Like Alan, you were a spoke in my wheel. You had to be removed."

He noticed the sudden look of dismay in her eyes at the mention of Jessup's name and followed his advantage. "But I am disposed to be generous, if not merely for a woman's sake, in memory of the kindly relations that have always existed between us. I do not wish you to suffer in mind or body or even to be greatly inconvenienced, and so I may tell you that Alan is not dead. He was removed to a hospital last night by Northby Pasha and I believe is now doing well."

She was grateful for that news and her gasp of relief did not escape him.

"You see, I am not so bad as I've been painted. But I'm playing a great game in Egypt, Fraulein, and I am playing it alone. So I cannot be altogether scrupulous in the means which I employ. But my deep and enduring affection for you!"

"Is this necessary, Captain von Hengel?" she questioned abruptly.

"It is, Fraulein," he said, coolly, "because I wish you to know that I plan to save you every unpleasantness. It is with that purpose that I have called you here to speak with me."

"I am no slave to run at your beck and call. As there is a law—your law suffer."

"There is no law for any German to-day," he put in warmly. "But the law of might. Every other consideration has passed."

"And with it all decency, all honor?"

He held up his hand, and as she paused from sheer excess of anger, he went on:

from a dreadful fate, death perhaps, or something even worse. And now while I keep you safe from the consequences of your temerity, you do nothing but abuse me. It is not fair, Fraulein Constance. Nicht wahr?"

He looked at her over the smoke of his cigarette and she thought that he was merely amusing himself with her. She was not accustomed to restraint and she felt sure that she had never hated any one in her life until now.

"You are a beast," she said, rising and turning helplessly toward the door.

Von Hengel rose also with his most ceremonious manner.

"I beg that you will be seated, Fraulein. Where should you go? Not to the harem, since the Sheikh is there for his evening hour in the bosom of his family. If you will bear with me some moments longer, perhaps I can convince you that I am not all vile."

She sank upon the deewan again in helpless despair. She knew now that in her newly discovered fear and hatred of this man she had behaved like a schoolgirl, giving vent to all her pent emotions. There was a finer game to play here, the game von Hengel was playing now. Alan was safe and soon would come to her. In the meanwhile, she must find patience and wait—whatever was to happen, learning meanwhile what she could.

"Appearances are against you, Conrad von Hengel," she gasped.

"Perhaps," he replied. "I cannot expect you to think me without sin against you. But my necessity knew no law. If you will have the patience to listen for a moment I will tell you why you misjudge me."

Constance bent her head over her clasped hands in token of assent.

"The object of my mission is known to

rules of the game, I should have left you last night to your fate."

"My rescue by Northby Pasha?" she suggested.

She scored one there and von Hengel smiled.

"I am afraid that Northby Pasha would never have found you," he said calmly. "The Khatib is a fanatic, the walls of the Hasaneyn are silent. You must give me credit for an act of compassion. But I will admit a motive of self-interest, too."

"Naturally."

He paused a moment before he went on. "In a day or two, Fraulein, I am starting east with the Kaba Stone. I shall not go alone. Descendants of the Prophet go with me, sheriffs and Sheikhs who stand high in Islam. In three months all the Mohammedan peoples of the world will be in arms against the British. Egypt will revolt, Arabia, Persia, India and the Turkish army, already fighting bravely before Jerusalem and upon the Tigris under German officers, will be armed with a terrible fanaticism which their sacred stone will bring."

"You dream?"

"You shall see. I am very sure of my dream—and of you. To show you how sure, I will tell you what will happen. Already here in Cairo the seed has been sown. A seed is enough. In a week the Kaba Stone will cross the Red Sea, where it will be lost in the Arabian desert. When it comes out again a million men will follow it. Armed men, Fraulein, with excellent German rifles and equipment, under German leaders. And then—he had risen and stood before her, his outflung arms suddenly falling in an expressive gesture—"and then the British armies will be thrown into the sea."

"You are a born actor, Sheikh Omar Hilal. I should never have suspected it."

I choose—a prisoner of war in a Moslem country. Do you realize what that means?"

A quick recollection of that look she had seen in Amneh's eyes came to her, and her gaze sought von Hengel's face. His lips were distorted with passion, disclosing ugly facts which had been hidden under the nicely trained blonde mustache. But she did not lose her courage.

"My nation is not yet at war with yours," she protested.

"But you are at war, Fraulein Masterson—a nurse, a soldier in the service of the British Government," he said, harshly.

He marked the shade that passed across her face and lost no time in following his advantage. "Your happiness, your security, depends on me. I have spent five years in Constantinople. You did not know that I am of Moslem faith. You are a Christian and my prisoner of war. You are my slave. I can make you my wife to-morrow—and divorce you when I choose."

He had come close to her and seized her by the wrist. It was not a gentle clasp and she shrank away from him with a gasp of horror, while she struggled to free herself. But in a moment he released her and straightened with a laugh and a shrug as he recovered control of his temper.

"Fraulein, I have spoiled everything. I have a quick temper. I am sorry. I do not understand women. Forgive me. I am not really bad—only tempestuous. There was a time in America, not very long ago, when I thought that you liked me a little. I would not harm you—not in the way I have suggested. I am sorry to have frightened you. There! Will you forgive me?"

A sound came from her throat, but she was watching him keenly all the while.

"I lost my temper. It was foolish. You made mock of me. It is the way of you Americans. But it is out of place with one who has a mission like mine—to conquer half the world for German arms, to succeed by a ruse in accomplishing what all the chancelleries of Europe have matched their dice for these forty years. And I shall succeed, Fraulein. The trump